

Not an Experiment by Nicememerino

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Summary:

After season 3's events, everything is normal. Well as normal as it can get. Billy Hargrove somehow survived the Mind Flayer and now Steve Harrington is just trying to make friends.

1. Dustin is a brat

Author's Note:

I feel like I don't have to say this but I'm going to just in case. This and my stonathan fics are in two completely different universes. I just wanted to make that clear.

"Why am I doing this again?" Steve asked. He was agitated, he had been driving Dustin around for a while now since Starcourt, mostly just back and forth to school but if Dustin asked him nicely Steve would take him to the arcade or the diner or the Byers. Today was different, instead of one Gremlin in his car he had 3 of them.

"I asked you if you would take me to the arcade and you said yes. What is so hard for you to understand?" Dustin asked. He had been having an attitude issue lately when it came to Steve.

After Suzie broke up with him Dustin had set eyes on Steve's best friend slash co-worker Robin. Which ended badly for Dustin because Steve shut that shit down quickly.

"You can't date Robin!" Steve shouted at him.

It was their fifth time having the conversation that day. Dustin was hanging out at Steve's house with Will and watching movies without being bothered by any adults. This was what Mrs.Henderson considered babysitting and Steve considered not being alone with his thoughts for days on end.

"And why not Steve? You aren't gonna make a move anytime soon! Why should I hold out on the ladies?" Dustin had argued. He wasn't wrong, Steve wasn't gonna make a move on Robin. Not with her being a lesbian and Steve barely being able to cope with taking care of himself after what happened in July.

Steve had told Dustin if he wanted free rides around town he wouldn't try and flirt with Robin anymore than he already had. Will quietly agreed with Steve and said that Dustin really shouldn't go

after a girl that was already graduated which sent both of the freshmen into an argument that lasted for about 2 days before Dustin pushed it behind him. He hadn't been as forgiving to Steve though.

"Yeah, but why are we all waiting on Lucas's girlfriend to get here inside my car? Maybe I had plans today Dustin! I could have had a date" Steve offered.

"Did you?" Lucas asked from the back of the car. Steve paused and exhaled.

"Well no, but-"

"Exactly. You've got nothing better to do than drive us around and wait on Max. So cool it. She should be here any minute." Dustin gloated. Steve huffed and grabbed his cigarettes from the dash of his car.

"Don't tell me to cool it. You cool it" Steve mumbled as he stepped out of his car and lit his cigarette. Who did that Munchkin think he was talking to Steve like that. Sure he's mad about Robin but that's no reason for him to treat Steve like his servant.

Steve inhaled deeply and let the smoke fill his lungs. Nancy had always told him that his smoking habit would be the one to kill him. But so far the Demagorgan and the Russians hadn't succeeded so if the smokes did the job then let them. Before he could exhale he saw a familiar car make its way towards the arcade parking lot.

The redhead hopped out of the car and made her way over to the Gremlins now crowded around the front of Steve's car. But not before saying a quiet

"Thanks, Billy" Before closing the door. The car shut off and out stepped none other than the blonde himself.

After everything happened at Starcourt everyone was convinced Billy was dead. He looked pretty dead, acted really dead. But somehow they rushed him to the hospital and 2 months later out came a quiet and secluded Billy Hargrove. He hadn't been pushing people around, or hooking up with anybody or doing anything other than driving

Max to meet with the other kids as far as Steve knew. But Steve didn't go out of his way to see the younger. But when he did see Billy he was always friendly.

Steve didn't have a problem with him anymore. Nobody really did but Steve paid attention to Billy anytime he saw him. At least paid more attention than he probably should have. As much as he despised Billy before the whole incident, he was still good looking. He still wore those jeans that hugged his ass just right and he still had those hands that Steve just wanted wrapped around his-

"Steve? Did you hear me? 8 o'clock okay? Closing" Dustin yelled waving a hand in his face. Steve snapped out of it and noticed Billy staring at him with a raised brow. More so Billy staring at Steve staring at him.

"Jesus Steve stop checking out Billy. Whatever. If you aren't here by 8 then I'll call my mom and she'll be pissed at you." Dustin declared smugly. Steve slapped Dustin's hand away from his face and nudged him away.

"Yeah yeah I'll be here. Don't call your mom or you'll be stuck inside for like 2 weeks with no ride anywhere." Steve threatened. He watched all the kids walk inside then turned to Billy. Steve wanted to talk to him, to say literally anything but nothing would come out.

"You just gonna gawk at me Harrington?" Billy said flicking his cigarette on the ground and stomping it out.

"I'm not gawking. I'm just, observing" Steve said like an idiot. Why the fuck couldn't he just carry on a normal conversation with Billy. Sure he was a walking monster a few months ago but wasn't everybody?

Billy scoffed and opened his car door.

"Yeah well, I'm not some science experiment so no need to pay too much attention," He said angrily and slammed his car door shut. Before Steve could even defend himself and tell Billy that's not what he meant, the other boy had sped off down the road going God knows where.

2. Hands

“Why do you care what he thinks anyway?” Robin had asked. It was Tuesday, Steve was at Family video rewinding tapes while Robin put up the new movies. Same routine, different day, and only a slightly different conversation topic.

“I don’t. Well, I do. But I don’t want him to think that when I look at him all I see is a monster” Steve huffed. He pulled another tape out of its box and started rewinding it. The cover read Agnes of God.

“Well, what do you see?” She asked. Steve continued with what he was doing as he absentmindedly answered Robin, too distracted to hear the front door open and close.

“I see a guy, who was a real dick to everybody but he went through some shit like the rest of us. Except nothing like the rest of us. He had it on a whole other level. He fought a monster that actually took over his body. He’s strong and smart, and brave, and” Steve hesitated. “He has some nice hands” He was met with silence.

“Hello? What are you not gonna say anything?” Steve called out to his co-worker. He stood up and went to where he knew Robin was supposed to be stocking shelves.

“You think my hands are nice?” Billy asked with a smirk on his face. Robin stood by the counter across from where Billy was standing. She had a grin on her face and pretended to be very interested in the chipped blue nail polish on her fingernails.

Steve stood there frozen. How the hell was he supposed to play this off? He pushed his hands into his pockets and looked around the store. Looking anywhere but at the two people standing right in front of him.

“I was just telling Billy how I think he should come over for movie night this week,” Robin said. She was now looking Steve directly in his eyes as if to say ‘invite him, Dingus’

“I told Robin here I wouldn’t want to intrude on King Steve’s movie

night," Billy said, still smirking at Steve.

Steve accidentally made eye contact with Billy and started furiously blushing.

"King Steve is long gone. You wouldn't be intruding on anything of his. But my house? What would you bring to the party Billy boy?" Steve asked, trying to play it cool. He tried not to outwardly cringe at the nickname that slipped out. Robin didn't even try to hide her reaction as she made a puking face.

"I've got some weed, my great hair, and I've always got my hands if the first two aren't enough for you Stevie " Billy joked.

This was the first time since Starcourt the two had even had a full conversation and Billy was kidding around with Steve. What the hell was going on? First Billy gets mad at a slight comment Steve makes and now he's at his work joking around like they've been friends for years.

"Just- Just the weed Billy. You don't even have to bring that. But it's Saturday night. Ten O'clock. Don't be late or we're starting without you." Steve choked out. He headed back to the backroom to finish rewinding the tapes so he could go home early. He needed a nap and a blunt.

By the time Steve got done rewinding the tapes and came back out to check on Robin, Billy was gone. Which was fine by Steve, it's not like he wanted to see Billy. It was just nice, seeing him relaxed and joking as any teenager should. Steve of course still thought it was weird that Billy and Nancy were still in high school. Yeah, they might be seniors and they might be graduating this May but it was still weird.

"So why didn't you tell me Billy was here?" Steve asked Robin as soon as he spotted her. She simply shrugged and kept messing with the cash register.

"I didn't know that I needed to announce every customer for you 'Stevie'" She joked. Unlike the nickname he used on Billy, this one was the opposite of cringey. At least it didn't feel weird until Robin used it.

“Don’t call me that. I prefer Dingus” Steve had stated as he straightened the movies on the shelf.

“Should I tell Billy you prefer Dingus or does he get to keep calling you by that cute little nickname?” Robin asked. She had finally got the register to pop open so she could count the cash. Steve rolled his eyes and moved on to the next aisle.

“Don’t tell Billy anything about me. Why do you even talk to him? I didn’t know you two were friends.” Steve stated. He truly didn’t know that they were friends. As far as he knew before today they had never even spoken.

“We aren’t. We’re acquaintances. That’s how you get normal people to be your friend Steve. Instead of dragging them into a Russian experiment lab and running from monsters you typically ask them what their favorite color is. Or you share notes or something.” Robin told him. She finished counting the money and put it back into the drawer.

“Do people typically invite acquaintances to movie night at their best friend’s house?” Steve asked, already knowing the answer. Robin frowned at him and clocked out motioning for Steve to do the same.

“No dingus, but you could use some more friends. Besides I’m sick of you staring at him every time he comes to rent a movie. Just talk to him! You act like he’s gonna start swinging the minute you say hey.” Steve sighed and clocked out. He opened the door for her and she locked it before heading over to Steve’s car.

“I do not stare at him.” He said, defending himself as he got into the driver seat and started the car.

Notes for the Chapter:

Please leave feedback. I'm so rusty and I am trying lmao. If you want to follow me\ send me prompts my Tumblr is @nicememerino

Thanks for reading!

3. Don't Be A Dick

Summary for the Chapter:

“Dustin we gotta talk man,” Steve said as Dustin slid into the car and buckled up. Dustin rolled his eyes and looked out of his window as Steve started driving.

Notes for the Chapter:

Just a FYI this chapter has many mentions of the f-slur. I censored it with asterisks for most uses but I just wanted to give a heads up.

Steve had eventually fallen asleep that night after tossing and turning for about 3 hours. He was supposed to pick Dustin up and take him to school before heading to the Byers' house to babysit El so his total sleep count rounded to about an hour before he realized he needed to get dressed.

Picking up Dustin usually wasn't an issue, but lately, Steve just wanted to make Dustin walk to school. Anything Steve said was met with the kid just being an asshole. Sure, Steve always joked around with the kids and they did the same back but this was more than just joking. It was Dustin being hateful and Steve didn't do well with hate.

“Dustin we gotta talk man,” Steve said as Dustin slid into the car and buckled up. Dustin rolled his eyes and looked out of his window as Steve started driving.

“What about? Are we gonna talk about your pathetic love life again?” He asked. He tried to put venom behind it but he sounded exhausted. Steve tried to not think too hard about it, everybody had been exhausted since July, the kid was no different.

“Man no. I wanted to talk about you. How you've been acting lately. What's going on with you?” Steve asked. He was concerned about Dustin, he might as well have been his younger brother and

something was clearly up with him. Steve just wasn't sure if it was all because of him or something else.

Dustin scoffed and pulled a book out of his backpack, "What's going on with me is none of your business. Why do you care anyways? You're acting like a..." Dustin stopped and tried to make the word come out. Steve wasn't sure what word he was expecting to come from Dustin's mouth but the one that made an appearance was not it.

"A f*gg*t." Dustin finally managed to spit out.

Steve slammed on breaks and pulled the car over.

"Get out," He said as he unlocked Dustin's door. Dustin looked at him in disbelief but Steve stood his ground.

"I'm serious Dustin. You aren't gonna say shit like that. To me, to anyone, and just think it's okay. So either get the fuck out of my car or apologize." Steve demanded.

Dustin didn't know what to do. Why was Steve so adamant about him not saying that word? It's not like it was hurting him, he had said plenty of bad words in front of Steve before and none of them had been matched with this level of seriousness.

"Man Steve you're being so overdramatic just take me to- " Steve stopped him and reached over and opened his door.

"Get out," Steve said. He wasn't giving Dustin an option anymore.

Steve had expected Dustin to call him a loser or a nerd or anything other than a slur. But he wasn't gonna put up with this. He would rather call Mrs. Henderson and tell her that he dropped her kid off somewhere down along the way to school rather than deal with Dustin calling him shit that his dad used to.

Steve's dad wasn't great. He didn't hit Steve, he never kicked him out, he made sure Steve had enough money to eat and pay the power bills but he was never there and he definitely wasn't Steve's number one fan. When Mr. Harrington was there; it seemed like his favorite pastime was ridiculing his son about anything and everything. It was always something about the way he dressed, the way he stood, who

he hung out with, nothing was ever good enough for Steve's dad. Typically whatever insult was thrown always was followed by the f slur so of course, the word hit a sore spot.

"Yeah, and what are you gonna tell my mom Steve?" Dustin asked. Steve looked Dustin dead in the eyes as he motioned for Dustin to get out.

"The truth. That you are using slurs and being a massive asshole lately and that I'm not gonna put up with it. Unless you apologize and start explaining why the hell you're acting like this."

At that Dustin had to rethink everything that had just happened. If his mom knew he was saying stuff like that he was sure to be in trouble. Way more trouble than just not having someone to drive him around. Plus, it's not like he meant what he said to Steve, it was just a word. A word that Troy had called him and Will, constantly.

Dustin hadn't been having a great time at school. It was his freshman year, he was a nerd, and his best friend's school-wide nickname was Zombie Boy. Most of the time it didn't bother Dustin when people looked at him and Will like they were weird, they hadn't seen the same stuff as them. It did bother him when one day he found Will being pushed into lockers by Troy.

"What Zombie Boy? Who's gonna save you now? Not your psycho mom or your f*gg*t brother, what are you gonna do? Play dead?" Troy taunted as he slammed Will into the lockers in between classes.

"Hey! Dickhole! Leave Will alone!" Dustin had yelled causing the teacher down the hall to look towards the group of boys. Why she hadn't noticed before Dustin started yelling was a mystery to Will, who had continuously yelled trying to get her attention. She quickly started jogging over to where they were pushing Will against the lockers. Before she could get there Troy scurried off, muttering a quick f-slur to Dustin as he passed him.

After that day Dustin and Will had been getting nearly harassed every time they were seen together. It was either spitballs, slurs, or being pushed around the halls. Will had let Dustin know that it was okay if he didn't want to hang out with him during school anymore, which

only infuriated the younger more. Of course, he was gonna keep hanging out with Will, Troy was nothing compared to the Mind Flayer and he refused to be pushed around like he was trash, especially if it involved Will.

“What if he’s right?” Will asked suddenly one day.

He and Dustin had been hanging out in the field where Dustin used to have his radio set up. Will was working on some drawing for his mom’s birthday while Dustin had been doing his Algebra homework. This had been their recent spot to hang out ever since the other members of the party started pairing off into relationships.

“What if who’s right?” Dustin said absentmindedly as he tried to figure out problem number 9. Will sat his sketchbook down and looked over at his best friend.

“What if I am a f*g?” Will asked.

At that, Dustin stopped writing and looked up. Will quickly looked down and started picking at the grass.

“What?” Dustin had asked. He was confused, he knew gay people, but he didn’t know Will was one of them.

Will put his head in his hands and groaned, “Nevermind I shouldn’t have said anything. Just go back to working on whatever you’re doing,” He picked up his sketchbook and tried to concentrate on the details of his mom’s hair. He had been trying to draw a picture of her for her birthday for about 3 months but he still couldn’t get the details right.

“No come on Will, you can’t say something like that then just drop it. Come on why do you think you’re gay?” Dustin asked. Sure it wouldn’t be surprising for one of his friends to be gay but Dustin had always thought it would have been El or Max, not Will.

“Jonathan was telling me about how it’s not uncommon. You just don’t see a bunch of gay people out here because it’s a small town. But in places like California and New York being gay is like normal.” Will explained. Dustin was still confused.

“So you think you’re gay because Jonathan told you it’s normal?” The younger had asked. Will groaned once again. He was frustrated, rightly so. Will never had to try and explain this to anyone until now and it was not going as he had planned.

“No, I think I’m gay because I like boys Dustin.” Will spilled. Now that it was just out in the open neither of the two knew what to say.

“Have you never looked at another boy and wondered what it’d be like to kiss him? Or just like, hold his hand.” Will questioned, he was trying to make Dustin say anything.

The issue with answering that question was that Dustin had thought about it, a lot. He always thought it was just his hormones. But what was even worse to Dustin was that he had thoughts like that about Will.

Ever since that conversation happened Dustin had been having trouble sleeping for more reasons than being worried about demodogs sneaking in his windows and eating him alive. He started acting out, pushing himself away from Will, he had even tried to flirt with whatever girls he could. Anything to convince himself what he thought about at night didn’t mean anything. That’s what had led to the whole Robin situation and Steve and Dustin's recent fighting.

Dustin shut Steve’s car door and sighed, “You ever think you might be gay?” He asked as he looked down at his hands. Steve sputtered for a second, unsure of what to do or say.

“Um, is there a specific reason you’re asking me this or-”

“Damn it, Steve. What if I’m gay?” Dustin yelled frustrated. Luckily all the windows in the car were rolled up or whatever people were walking around Dustin's neighborhood would have heard him. Steve started driving and kept quiet until they were about a block away from the high school.

“It’s okay,” Steve said simply. Dustin looked up from his hands and stared at the older boy. He tried to say something but Steve held up

his hand.

“It’s okay to be gay. Or question what you like. But it’s not okay to say shit like you just did a few minutes ago. Just because the assholes at school talk like that doesn’t mean you need to. If anything that’s another reason you should avoid using it. You don’t want to be like them.” Steve explained.

“How can you just say it’s okay though? Most people think it’s super gross. Steve, are you-” But Steve stopped outside the school doors and unlocked the car.

“Listen Gremlin, It doesn’t matter. You just do you and don’t let people bother you about it. If it’ll make you feel better I can pick up a pizza or something Friday and we can talk. If you still want to talk about it that is.” Steve offered.

Dustin just nodded his head quickly and opened his door and got out. He waved by to Steve and started walking into the building preparing to deal with Troy’s daily bullshit. Except for this time, Dustin was feeling better about himself.

Notes for the Chapter:

thanks for reading! If you guys want to request something or send me prompts my tumblr is @nicememerino

Please leave me feedback! good and bad.

4. After School Shenanigans

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve goes to pick the Gremlins up from school

Steve went and knocked on the Byers' door and waited maybe 30 seconds before an excited El swung it open and threw her arms around Steve, engulfing him in a hug.

“Hey, El. Where’s Joyce?” He asked as he stepped into the house. El shut the door behind him and pointed down the hall.

When the Byers moved they decided it was probably best to stay close to Hawkins, they had gotten a pretty good-sized house right outside of town with the hush money the government provided. The house was close enough that Will was able to stay at school with his friends and Joyce could keep her job.

“Mrs. Byers! I’m here!” He called out towards her room. She quickly came out of her bedroom as she finished buttoning up her Melvalds vest.

“Thank you so much for staying with her Steve. I should be home around 5, are you still picking the boys up from school?” She asked as she ran around the living room collecting her things and kissing El on the forehead as a goodbye.

“Yep! I’ll get Will back here in one piece. Be safe Mrs. Byers!” He called out after her as she ran out the door. As the door closed, he turned and glanced over the room.

This house was bigger than the old one but it was still homey and comfortable. On the walls there were pictures of Jonathan and Will as kids, some of El scattered throughout but in reality, they hadn’t been able to document her existence until recently when the government finally gave them the okay. Since then, Jonathan had decided to take plenty of pictures of her, making sure she knew that she was a part of the family just as much as he and Will were.

Everyone in the house had their own room, the kitchen was large, there was a separate dining room, and Steve bet that they could probably fit at least three couches in the living room. Joyce had argued that they only needed two.

Steve turned his attention towards El and shrugged. He had always been close with the kids but he and El never really had a chance to get to know each other until she moved into the Byers house and started homeschool. He knew more about where she came from than he did about her but he still tried, it was just hard with both of them not knowing how to act around each other. It wasn't until he started babysitting for Joyce that he had learned anything personal about her, it started with El showing Steve all her scrunchies, her favorite one that Max had given her, the first one she ever bought, the one that Mike gave her for her birthday.

El's birthday was celebrated intensely, Steve came to find out. All the kids always went way out and tried to make the craziest parties for her. She had only had two birthdays since she had escaped the lab, but everyone always tried to make them special for her. Since the only people who knew her real birthday was the government and maybe Brenner, the kids decided they would celebrate it on the day she had shown up.

Steve learned everything he could ever want to know about El after all the time he spent babysitting her. Of course, she had school work to do but after the first few weeks, they established a routine. Steve would get there, say bye to Mrs. Byers, listen to El talk about whatever she wanted for about 30 minutes, then she would hop into her school work for the day. Once El ran out of things to talk about and didn't have anything particularly interesting to share, she started talking to Steve while she did her work. It turns out she's a better multitasker than most of the kids.

When Joyce wasn't there with her somebody else typically was just to make sure she was doing her work. The plan had been for her to catch up as quickly as she could then for Hopper to enroll her into Hawkins High when the time came, but now Hop was gone and El wasn't exactly ready to be a freshman.

"So are you still working on 7th-grade math or have you moved up

since I last saw you?" Steve asked as he pulled out a chair from the kitchen table. It had only been a week since he had last babysat but El was surprisingly good with math and moved quickly. She was maybe even better than the other Gremlins.

"I'm almost done with 7th grade. Joyce said I might be able to go to school with Will next year!" El explained as she grabbed her most recent worksheets from the desk in the corner. She spread them out on the table and took the seat next to Steve.

"That's great kiddo! Do you need help with any of it?" Steve asked. Most of the time if she got stuck she'd come to him on her own, but there had been few occasions where Steve had found her with tears of frustration coming out of her eyes because there were some problems she just couldn't quite grasp.

El shook her head and looked up at Steve, "Do you?" She asked him. El had also started asking Steve questions about his personal life, which he didn't mind, but most stuff that goes on in his life wasn't exactly exciting.

"Do I what?" Steve questioned back. Of course, he didn't need help with 7th-grade math, he was the one teaching her, not the other way around.

"Need help. You're confused" She said matter-of-factly. Steve groaned and shook his head since they had gotten closer El had lost all ideas of boundaries when it came to looking into Steve's head or asking questions about anything going on. It wasn't fun when she had come out of Jonathan's room one day with a dirty magazine and asked Steve why some of the girls weren't wearing shirts.

"What is with you kids and being in my head. No El, I don't think you can help me with what I've got going on." Steve answered as calmly as he could. Between wanting to see Billy, Dustin basically coming out to him, Robin telling him he needs more friends, and him being the resident babysitter, Steve had his hands full.

"I can try," El stated. She sat her pencil down and focused completely on Steve. He rolled his eyes and nudged her.

"You're just trying to get out of having to do your work. But I'll humor you." Steve said as he leaned back as far as he could in the wooden dining chair, he saw El's face light up out of the corner of his eye.

"Robin thinks I need more friends, and I want to be friends with this one guy, but I don't think he likes me very much," Steve explained. He wasn't about to spill everything to a 14-year-old, he tried to be as vague as he possibly could considering the circumstances.

"Billy?" She asked. Steve blinked at her, once, twice, three times, before he spoke.

"You in my head again kid?" He asked jokingly. El shook her head and rolled her eyes, a habit she had learned from Mike.

"You like him," She stated once again with her matter-of-fact tone. Steve groaned for what felt like the millionth time that day.

"Yeah, I guess. He's better now. He isn't trying to beat me up constantly, which is nice. He comes in to rent movies sometimes and he's smiling" Steve explained. Of course, he liked Billy, he thought he was super cool, he had since he had first shown up in Hawkins.

"You want him to be your boyfriend," El said. She then picked up her pencil and looked back at her paper as if she hadn't said anything strange at all.

"What? El no. I don't want Billy to be my boyfriend. That's crazy. Insane. I mean he tried to beat me up! You weren't here for that but he could have killed me!" Steve said, trying to convince himself more than El. She shrugged and started working on her paper.

"Jonathan said it's okay," El informed Steve. Of course, he knew what she was talking about but he really didn't want to have this conversation with another 14 years old. He should at least talk to Robin about it first before he involved all of the Gremlins. Steve sighed and rubbed a hand over his face wishing his life was easier.

"I know it's okay El, but lots of people think it's really not okay. Billy is probably one of those people"

El looked up from her paper at her babysitter, "Max said he is better. He isn't mean to her anymore. He talks to her." El said looking into Steve's eyes. "Maybe he won't be mean to you" She suggested. It was probably the best words any of the Gremlins had ever said to him but he didn't want to inflate El's ego so he changed the subject to breakfast which quickly got her mind off of Steve's boy problems.

When it came time to go get Will and Dustin, Steve asked El if she wanted to ride with him. As far as people in Hawkin's knew, El was Will and Jonathan's cousin Elenor whose mom had recently passed. That was the story they had stuck to ever since El had been able to go out and people had started asking questions, but Joyce had still tried to keep her away from people that might go poking where their noses didn't belong. El still left the house at any chance she got, today being no exception.

The two pulled up in the high school parking lot and sat for a few minutes before the final bell rang and students started pouring out into the parking lot. Before they saw any of the Gremlins, El spotted the exact person Steve was hoping to avoid, El hit Steve's arm and pointed to the blonde. Steve quickly pushed her hand down and reminded her it was rude to point.

"Go talk," She told Steve. Before he could protest, he looked up and made eye contact with the younger boy.

Billy was wearing a tight pair of jeans, his regular black boots, and the tightest black shirt he had ever seen on a boy. It held onto his biceps like the shirt was clinging for dear life, Steve didn't even want to think about how good Billy would look if somebody dumped water on him right now.

The brunet was quickly pulled out of his fantasy when El pinched his arm.

"You're gonna pay for this when we get home," Steve told her as he watched Billy walk towards the car.

"Hey pretty boy, didn't expect to see you here," He said casually as

Steve stepped out of the car.

“Yeah yeah don’t cream your pants” Steve replied as he tried to hide his smile. From inside the car, he heard a quiet hum of confusion. Billy had heard it too because before Steve could say anything the blonde looked into his rolled down window and came face to face with El.

“Oh shit,” Billy said as he jumped back. He hadn’t expected another person to be in the car with Steve.

“Billy, this is-” Steve started before he was rudely interrupted.

“El!” Max yelled as she ran up to the car. She quickly pushed Steve out of the way and hopped in the car to talk to her best friend. Billy laughed as he pulled out a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket. How they hadn’t become crushed against his pecs, Steve would never know.

“You let all the shitheads push you around like that?” Billy asked as he lit the item in his hand. Steve chuckled and glanced into the car to check on El.

“Nah, but they don’t get to see her a lot so it’s understandable,” Steve explained. Billy nodded and offered Steve a drag of his cigarette.

“I’ve met her before. Just so you know,” Billy said as Steve plucked the cig out of his hand.

Steve raised an eyebrow before taking a drag. “Really?” Steve asked. As far as he knew, El’s contact with the outside world was super limited, there was no reason for her to have ever met Billy.

“Well, more than once. But only once as me.” Billy said. Steve didn’t have to ask what he meant by that.

After Starcourt happened and everyone had started to heal Steve had finally gotten the courage to ask what happened to Billy and the munchkins had explained the whole flayer incident in detail, including the sauna story. Steve still didn’t like to bring it up but Billy mentioned it as if it was as normal as asking about the weather. Steve was gonna ask where he and El had met but before he had a

chance the rest of the kids had come running to the car.

“Steve!” Lucas had shouted. He ran up to give him a high five but he spotted Billy, he decided against getting too close and just gave Steve a quick nod before going around to the other side of the car where El had her window rolled down. Steve heard Billy audibly sigh from beside him and suddenly Steve wondered if he had ever apologized for what had happened that night.

“We should get pizza and go back to Will’s to start the campaign!” Dustin yelled. All of the kids shouted in agreeance as they started to pile into Steve’s car. He and Billy were standing next to the driver’s side door. Will had looked over at the two and gave them a weird look before sliding into the backseat.

“Looks like I have to get them all pizza and watch them play the game for the rest of the night. You want to come hang out and make my life a bit more bearable?” Steve asked before he could even process what he was offering.

Billy gave him a smirk and stole the cigarette back from him, “I’ll meet you there?” He asked as he licked his lips before he took a long drag off the stick. Steve was mesmerized but was quickly shaken out of his trance by El tugging on his shirt sleeve.

“Yeah, you know where Will lives?” Steve asked as he watched Billy get into his newly fixed Camaro. Steve hadn’t even noticed it parked a few cars down. Max quickly took the hint and got out of Steve’s car and headed to get into Billy’s.

“We’ll find out won’t we princess?” Billy said as he pulled off leaving Steve slightly mesmerized.

On the way home everyone kept asking Steve about Billy and what was going on between the two boys.

“I saw you guys sharing a cigarette. I might be 14 but I know that’s not something normal people do” Lucas said as they pulled out of the pizza hut drive-thru. Steve rolled his eyes and continued to ignore

their questions until Mike said something that pissed him off.

“My mom said that you’ll get aids if two guys share saliva” Mike, of course, meant nothing by it, he knew what aids were and what his mom really meant. He wasn’t even trying to be an asshole, it was just one of those comments you let slip and then realize what it means the second it comes out of your mouth.

Steve huffed and replied with, “Yeah well your mom was trying to fuck Billy last summer so I’m not sure what she considers worse, being gay or a predator”

All the kids had gotten quiet when they heard that, mostly because nobody knew about it except a select few people, and Steve wasn’t supposed to be one of them. He honestly didn’t know how true it was, Heather had come into Scoops that summer and he had overheard her telling the story to her friends and in all honesty, Mrs. Wheeler was kind of a creep, so he wouldn’t put it past her.

The kids all made a noise that Steve could only describe as disgusted as he continued towards the house. Steve regretted saying anything about the incident but he wasn’t gonna let the kids think he tolerated people saying stuff like that. He almost made Dustin walk to school that morning because of a slur, there was no way he was gonna let the kids think he condoned Mike’s mom’s behavior just because she was an adult.

“Mike, your mom is a cougar,” Dustin had said quietly before the car erupted with laughter and moans of protest from Mike.

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry for taking so long to update. I'm still tryna figure out how I'm gonna progress the story and stuff. Anyways I'm watching Midsommer rn and it is a tripppppp.

If you have any requests, asks, or prompts send them my way on Tumblr. my @ is nicememerino

Thanks for reading!!!

5. Worth It

Summary for the Chapter:

The boys hang out at the Byers residence.

When Steve pulled in, the Camaro was sitting in the driveway and there was a figure leaning against the hood. Steve laughed a little to himself as he put the car in park and killed the engine. Apparently, Billy did know how to get to the Byers.

He looked towards the porch and spotted Max sitting on the newly installed porch swing. It had taken Steve, Jonathan, and Nancy just to figure out how to put it together, it was even worse when they had argued over who was gonna test it out.

All the kids quickly jumped out of the car and ran inside. They had left all but one of three pizzas in the car for Steve to take inside. He picked up the two pizzas and attempted to shut the car door with his leg when Billy came up behind him.

“I got you,” Billy said as he closed the car door and took the pizzas out of Steve’s grasp, their hands brushing against each other for only a second.

After managing to get inside without being trampled on by the Gremlins, Billy and Steve served themselves some pizza and went to sit on the couch to find something to watch on TV. The kids chose to sit at the dining room table which was far enough from the two boys that they couldn’t hear anything the kids were saying over the volume of the TV.

“So, why do we think Steve is suddenly friends with Max’s psycho brother?” Dustin asked, making sure to stay quiet so they wouldn’t have a repeat of the last time Billy was in the Byers residence. Max kicked him under the table and leaned forward and lowered her voice.

“Maybe they are friends,” Max said, feigning surprise. Will laughed, it was Dustin’s turn to kick someone.

“I’m serious, what if he’s threatening Steve or something? What if the mind flayer is back? What if-” Dustin kept questioning before El finally cut him off.

“They are friends,” She said simply. Most of the time no one argued with El, they just assumed she knew things. Which she did.

She used that to her advantage a lot. The pettiest incident had been when she told Jonathan that the cocoa puffs were expired and would make him sick so she could eat them the next morning. Incidents like that made it difficult for people to believe her but the party didn’t question her, especially Mike who was still head over heels for her.

Lucas shifted uncomfortably in his seat and Max looked over at him with raised brows. He was the most worried about Steve’s friendship with Billy, even if he didn’t express it out loud.

“I’m worried, I know we can handle ourselves, but remember what happened last time Billy got mad? I don’t want to watch Lucas get slammed into a wall and Steve almost die, again. I know you said he’s better,” Mike said looking at Max, the same tone of annoyance in his voice he had since puberty started. “but we just can’t help but freak about him being around all of a sudden”

Everyone nodded in agreement and Max sighed as she pushed herself away from the table, “I’ll be back”

In the living room, Steve and Billy were watching Cheers, and eating their pizza in what Max could sense was awkward tension. When she walked in both boys looked up at her like they had done something wrong.

“What’d you need Max?” Steve asked nicely, as his demeanor quickly changed.

He was always willing to do almost anything for the kids, but the last time Max had asked for something, Steve had used way too much gas to take Max shopping at a mall at least 2 hours away for El’s birthday. Steve later found out it was all for a ‘special scrunchie’ that

lit up when you hit it hard enough. He didn't think it was worth a tank of gas.

Max pointed at Billy and the blonde's eyes went wide, she hadn't been mad at him in a while and he wasn't planning to start shit at the Byers house ever again.

"Apologize to Lucas, and the whole party, but mostly Lucas. He's worried you are gonna attack him or something because of last time. Plus Mike is worried you're gonna try and kill Steve again" She explained.

Max had calmed down more when it came to her brother. First, he tried to kill her unofficial boyfriend, she drugged him, everything was normal for a bit, and then he got taken over by a monster and almost died, she didn't give much effort into threatening him anymore. He had been through enough.

Billy sighed and looked at his sister, "I'm not gonna attack him, tell your shit bird friends to mind their business" Billy said as he turned his attention back to the TV. Steve grimaced at Max and turned towards Billy.

The redhead walked into the dining room and sat down once again and started to eat her pizza.

"Come on man, give the kids a break" Steve somewhat pleaded with the younger boy.

Billy rolled his eyes and refused to look at Steve. Billy had thought about apologizing, he thought about it a lot actually. But he had never spoken to any kid other than Max, nonetheless apologized to one. He knew what he did was bad but it was hard to put into words how sorry he was. He couldn't tell a bunch of 15 year olds why he acted the way he did back then. He thought him changing his attitude for the most part would have been enough for them.

"I'm going to Princess, don't get your panties in a twist," Billy sighed and turned his attention back to the TV.

The boys had long since finished their food and Steve had discarded their plates. Once he came back and sat down on the couch he felt

restless.

He couldn't get comfortable and would move every 30 seconds trying to readjust. Billy finally looked over at him and asked him what he was doing. The older boy hesitated before stretching his legs out towards Billy a little more.

"When I hit you with the car, to stop you from running over all the kids at the mall, My leg got stuck and I guess I messed it up somehow." Steve's voice shook as he remembered thinking he killed Billy. "It works, as you can tell, but sometimes it just clenches up on me now and hurts. I can't lay it a certain way, I'm used to being spread out on the couch so this is new for me." Steve explained.

Billy laughed and gently tugged Steve's legs into his lap as if it was the most normal thing in the world for the boys to be touching.

"Wow, princess didn't even remember you hitting me with a car. Must have really wanted me dead" Billy said with a fake smile on his face.

Steve was still in shock from Billy just pulling his legs and putting them on top of himself so he hesitated before speaking again, but he knew if he waited too long Billy would think Steve actually did want him dead.

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"I, uh, I thought I had killed you and I couldn't stop shaking. Robin basically pulled me into the mall after that because I couldn't move, and not just cause of my leg. I wanted to go and check on you but we had bigger issues inside the mall. I didn't want you dead but I couldn't let you hit the kids. I mean without them, what's the point of me even being here?" Steve explained, shrugging as he said the last part.

It left Billy speechless, he knew that Steve didn't necessarily hate him, and it probably meant nothing to Steve, but the blonde was almost warmed at the fact that the older boy had been worried about him. Even if it was just because he thought he had killed him.

"Man you've got a lot more to live for other than those shitheads," Billy said, assuring his new friend. Steve scoffed as if to say 'yeah like

what?' He sighed and got comfortable under Steve's legs.

"You've got the kids, yeah, and they'd probably be dead without you, but you've also got Buckly, and Jonathan, and Miss Priss Wheeler," Billy said, scrunching up his nose.

He still didn't like Nancy, as much as he tried to get along with everyone after he had almost died, he still couldn't hop on the 'I love Nancy Wheeler' train. Everything about her just made Billy's skin crawl, from the way she held herself as the smartest in the room, to how she just threw Steve away like he was trash, all of it bothered Billy. Her mom being obsessed with him also didn't help Nancy's chance of having him join her fan club.

"Man she's not that bad if you give her a chance," Steve said as he shifted to where he was now looking at Billy instead of the TV screen. "and all of those people are cool, trust me I love everybody, but sometimes I feel like I'm just replaceable to them. Trust me, I couldn't find another Dustin Henderson if I tried, but if I just disappeared, no doubt everybody here would get over it in a matter of weeks." Steve said confidently. It was a sad thing for someone to be so sure about, and Billy wasn't quite sure what to say other than the one word that stuck out in his mind.

"Bullshit" He simply said as he stared at Steve. The older boy just rolled his eyes and shrugged. Billy shifted in his seat to where his body was facing the other boy. On each side of Billy was one of Steve's feet, but the last thing Billy was concerned about was Harrington's legs wide open in front of him.

"Everything about me is bullshit," Steve mumbled, remembering Nancy's words. He was bullshit, his whole life was bullshit, the whole King Steve thing is bullshit.

"I'm so serious Steve. No matter what your brain comes up with there, you've got people here that care about you. You're crazy if you think anybody in this house right now could just up and forget about you in a month or two." Billy said, furthering his point. Steve sighed and pushed himself up on his elbows.

"Really? So you're saying if I just died you'd miss me, Hargrove?"

Steve asked, he was mostly trying to make a joke out of the situation and make Billy said something stupid so they could both laugh and pretend like Steve hadn't just opened up to his ex-nemesis.

This was the first time Steve had mentioned him feeling replaceable to anybody other than Robin. The only reason she even found out was because Steve had gotten so drunk one night while hanging out with her that he just vomited all his feelings up, literally and metaphorically. She, of course, made him talk about it the next morning and reassured him that plenty of people would miss him, but the feeling still lingered. It wasn't something that would just go away.

Billy leaned over and put his hand on Steve's shoulder as best he could, they were already in a super weird position but that wasn't on Billy's mind at that moment.

"Damn right I'd miss you, pretty boy," Billy said, staring into Steve's deep brown eyes, he didn't know what to do next. He wanted to lean in and hug Steve but that was probably crossing the line too far, so he awkwardly moved his hand off of Steve's shoulder and got back in the position he was in before the whole conversation occurred, he pulled Steve's feet back into his lap before trying to focus on whatever commercial was currently playing on the TV.

Steve slowly leaned off his elbows and laid back down. He tried to turn his attention back to the TV but all he could think about was what Billy had said.

'Damn right I'd miss you, pretty boy'

The rest of the night went by without any mishaps or fights. Eventually, Steve fell asleep on the couch almost trapping Billy underneath him, almost being the keyword. The younger picked Steve's legs up carefully and set them back down as soon as he was out of the way. He hadn't been inside the house before but he quickly figured out where the door to the back porch was, unlucky for him he had to walk through the dining room to get there.

When he passed through a hush spread over the table and six pairs of eyes all followed him as he unlocked the door and headed outside, he

hesitantly looked over his shoulder.

“Sinclair, come here,” Billy called out as he shut the screen door behind him. He lit his cigarette and had almost finished half of it by the time Lucas made it outside. Billy motioned for the boy to come sit next to him on the steps and Lucas hesitantly complied.

Lucas’s leg was shaking so bad that Billy thought he might twitch it out of the socket. He tried not to pay any mind to it as he finished his cigarette. The whole idea of the conversation made Billy feel uncomfortable but he was too far in to just ignore it now. He pulled another out of his pack and lit it before finally speaking.

“I can’t tell you why I did it, because I honestly don’t have a good reason, but I’m sorry for almost beating your ass. It was way out of line, I mean you’re just a kid. Whether you’re dating my sister or not, I don’t care, but you need to know that some people do care, a whole lot and will do a lot worse than I did. I know you guys can probably handle it, hell, I know for a fact Max can,” Billy hesitated before continuing. “she likes you and I can tell you like her, but both of you need to make sure Neil does not find out,” Billy said, warning the younger boy.

They both sat there in the dark for a minute before Lucas said anything, “Thanks, for apologizing. I know some assholes don’t like it, but me and Max can handle them. She almost killed you, what’s stopping her from kicking a stranger’s ass?” Lucas asked as he laughed awkwardly.

Billy started laughing too as he realized just how bizarre the situation was. He offered a cigarette out of his pack to the kid but he turned it down and went back inside. Billy listened as he heard Lucas shut the screen door and head back to his friends, nobody speaking until after the chair squeaked on the ground as it was being pulled out.

Billy stayed outside in the cool evening air for a while longer and thought about how much had changed since the fourth of July. He was okay with Max, he had friends like Robin and Heather, and maybe even Steve. The shitheads didn’t hate him, he wasn’t living with Neil anymore, and he was managing as well as he could for someone that lived with a monster inside of him for a month.

Everything was on the up and up for the most part.

Billy heard a car approaching the house and decided that it was officially time for him to go back inside and wake Steve up. No matter how peaceful Steve looked while sleeping, Billy was pretty sure Mrs. Byers wouldn't appreciate her babysitter sleeping on the job.

The blonde walked into the living room and laid both hands on Steve's shoulders and shook him awake. Steve jumped up and grabbed the pillow he had been laying on like it was a weapon. He wound up as if he was getting ready to swing. He looked around the room as he struggled to breathe and when his eyes finally landed on Billy he started to slowly lower the cushion.

"I fall asleep?" Steve asked, practically mumbling. Billy nodded and reached his hand out to take the pillow from Steve's hands and sit it down.

"You okay pretty boy?" Billy asked cautiously. Steve scoffed and rolled his eyes, a tiny smirk on his lips.

"Yeah, just worried about the monsters," Steve said nonchalantly as he looked over at the clock.

His eyes went wide as he rushed into the dining room to find the kids in the middle of their campaign, he turned his attention to Billy with his mouth wide open.

"You let me sleep for four hours and nobody got into a fight while I was out?" Steve asked, his eyes full of what could only be described as amazement. Before Billy could answer and ask if his usual babysitting gig was more exciting than this, Mike opened his mouth.

"That's because we all thought Billy killed you and we didn't want to be next," Mike said with a shit-eating grin on his face. El rolled her eyes and then turned her attention to the front door as Joyce walked in carrying a load of groceries, Jonathan following not far behind her.

"Groceries" Jonathan called out as he walked towards the kitchen, all

the kids got up from the table and headed out to the car to get the bags.

Billy had never seen all the shit heads do something that quickly without having to be yelled at before, Steve included. The blonde walked outside and grabbed a few bags and headed back inside to help Mrs. Byers take everything out of the sacks.

Once all of the food was put away and Joyce and Jonathan took a minute to say hello to everyone the kids got back to their normal campaign chaos. Jonathan walked by Steve and Billy, giving them a nod as he headed to his room.

“Steve thanks so much for taking care of dinner tonight. I didn’t realize what time it was until I was done checking out and by the time I had left it was only 10 minutes until Jonathan got off so I didn’t wanna waste the gas to come home then just go back,” Joyce said as she reached into her purse and pulled out a twenty-dollar bill to give to Steve.

Steve just pushed the money back into Joyce’s hands and went to introduce Billy, but before he could Joyce’s eyes lit up as she smiled at the younger of the two boys.

“Oh, Billy, it is so good to see you. How is the cabin? Is it getting hotter out there yet? I’m not sure if Hop ever had the air fixed but if it’s not working we can get it fixed by the time May comes around,” Joyce offered. Billy’s face turned red and he averted his gaze away from Steve.

“The air is working great Mrs. Byers, thanks for letting me stay there,” Billy said as he looked around the living room. “Your house is nice, the first time I’ve been over since you moved. I’m glad you guys found a place so close” Billy complimented. Joyce smiled and explained to Billy how they ended up on the edge of town while Steve just stood by smiling.

He hadn’t known Billy knew anything about Mrs. Byers other than the fact that she was Will and Jonathan’s mom. Turns out he knew enough to know about the cabin Hop used to have, and he knew them well enough that Joyce let him stay there.

“So Billy, what are you doing here? Did you come by to get Max? I could have taken her home, it’s not an issue for-” Steve quickly cut Mrs. Byers off as politely as possible.

“I asked him to come hang out with me while the kids played D and D. Sorry I didn’t ask you first, it was just kind of a spur of the moment thing and-” Steve said, rambling as he tried to explain. It was now Joyce’s turn to cut him off with a dismissive wave and a smile.

“It’s fine Steve, I trust you to not let any hellions into my house. Besides, Billy you are always welcome here, especially when it starts getting hot out there, that’s all Hop would ever talk about last May was how he wished he had a better AC unit” Joyce said laughing. Her face turned slightly sad as she mentioned Hopper, everybody had to deal with his loss but Joyce still wasn’t convinced he was dead.

She never told the kids that of course, but late one night while having a cigarette with Steve on her back porch after a long day of work she had confided in him.

“I am gonna sound crazy but what’s new,” She said as she started. “I just don’t think he’s gone Steve, his body disappearing without a trace? It just seems unlikely to me, I just hope he didn’t end up on the other side of that portal.”

They had been talking about how the loss of Hop had affected the kids, specifically El. Steve had told her how he had always held a grudge against the Chief when he was younger but then he realized what a dick he had been. Joyce had laughed at that.

“Well it almost is time for Max to get home, so we are gonna have to take off soon, but it was really good to see you, Mrs. Byers,” Billy said as he pulled the older woman in for a hug.

After the blonde had said his goodbyes and collected Max, he headed outside followed by Steve. The nights were starting to warm up a bit but Steve still shivered as the breeze hit his bare arms. The Byers had moved far away enough to where they didn’t have any close neighbors but they still had street lights, Steve was thankful that he didn’t have to walk to his car in the dark every time he came over.

“So pretty boy, this was fun,” Billy said. Max had gone ahead and gotten into the Camaro, keys in her hand as she started the car from the passenger side and turned on some music that Billy was sure to change as soon as he got in.

“Fun? I fell asleep on you and you watched TV for four hours. Your regular Wednesdays must suck.” Steve remarked. Billy laughed along with the older boy and looked around them at the trees. The wind had started blowing even harder and the trees moving around in the wind looked too close to a certain beast he had faced before. He started shaking and turned back to Steve, eager to get in his car and drive away from the monster look-a-likes.

“It was alright, hopefully, you won’t fall asleep on me on Saturday though, I’ll see you then?” Billy asked as he walked towards his car, Steve just nodded and mumbled a quick bye before heading back inside.

He had been scared in the woods ever since the experience he had in December a few years prior. He was also scared of pools, or lakes, or the quarry. Really if you named anywhere in Hawkins, Steve was probably a little spooked to be there alone. The whole town creeped him out ever since he discovered what was hiding beneath his feet, literally.

Billy wasn’t much different, he didn’t like the sauna at the pool much anymore, he avoided what was left of Starcourt, and he never went by the old barn anymore. Ever. He tried playing it off when Max had asked why they were taking the long way to go to Mike’s, but she realized something was off when Billy started shaking so she dropped it.

He still had his job at the pool, well as soon as the pool opened back up he would. He wasn’t super excited to have to go back there and relive what he remembered from that summer, but the money was okay and he had Heather to help him out when he needed it.

“So you and Steve,” Max started, a grin on her face. Billy groaned and rolled his eyes as they came upon Cherry Lane.

“Me and Steve nothing. We’re friends Max, leave it alone.” Billy said.

He passed Max's house and turned around in the cul-de-sac, stopping as he came back around to the old house.

"All I'm saying is, I've never let El fall asleep on me, and I've definitely never shared cigarettes with her before," Max said, smirking as she grabbed her book bag from the floorboard. Billy kept quiet because he didn't have an answer for Max. The redhead rolled her eyes and opened the car door.

"Don't worry, I'll stay quiet about your 'pretty boy' but don't scare him off, Steve's a really cool babysitter and mom and Neil actually trust him." Max stated before she gave a quick salute as a 'thanks for the ride' and headed towards her front door.

Billy sighed and started towards the cabin, turning the radio up as loud as he could as soon as he left Cherry Lane.

Notes for the Chapter:

I'm back. I've moved into my apartment. I am less depressed.

6. sorry lmao

Summary for the Chapter:

update

Hi guys, it's been like 2? years. Since I've updated. Sorry for leaving yall hanging. I'm back and I'm gonna be releasing the story. As a different one. I went back and read the story and the plot line is good, but I just don't like the way my writing style was back then. I've currently been revising the entire thing for 5 hours and I'm finally done revising, I've written two new chapters, and I just wanted to update yall. I am going to be deleting this story soon. Probably as soon as i revise the two chapters I just wrote, so give me about two days. I will be releasing the polished version By the end of January. I'm still going to do the weekly chapters just so I can get feedback but the first chapter should be out by January 31st at the latest. I want to finish the story before I start releasing stuff so i wont have a repeat of last time where i just dissapeared of the face of the earth. If youre reading this thank you for still supporting me after I've been on my long ass hiatus. much love.

Life update, I've moved out of my familys house, I have a boyfriend, I adopted a cat, my life is going really good right now. Not to jinx it.

Author's Note:

Come give me fic requests on my Tumblr
@nicememerino

Also, I'm always open to feedback. Good and bad so please give me some.